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ABSTRACT

New approaches to career and technical education (CTE) create new roles for career educators, including providing career awareness, counseling, guidance, and self-education. Career educators must understand and reflect upon career development theories; teaching and learning strategies; school-to-work practices; school/business linkages; and technology use for career development. Because these are continually evolving in focus and design, career educators need ongoing education to both support their teaching and their assumption of new roles as coach, collaborator, business partner, and technology advocate. Professional development is a key tool for career educators to use in enhancing interpersonal skills such as communication, negotiation, and teamwork. In order to best serve teachers, professional development activities must have the following characteristics: (1) ongoing and long term; (2) job-embedded and inquiry-based; (3) supportive of current teaching beliefs; (4) related to reform efforts; (5) based upon appropriate adult learning experiences; and (6) support systemic change. (Contains 12 references.) (AJ)

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Professional Development for Career Educators

New approaches to career-technical education (CTE) such as school to work, career clusters, and integrated curriculum place different demands on career educators. What are those demands? How can career educators prepare themselves to meet them? This Digest describes the new role of career educators in providing career awareness, counseling, exploration, and guidance, as well as successful professional development practices for career educators and others.

Challenges for Career Educators

Career education is intended to prepare students for a variety of career and life roles, empowering them to construct their own career destinies and encouraging them to recognize how various events and innovations can lead to multiple careers over their lifetimes (***Career Guidance and Counselling*** 2000). This is not an easy task for career educators who, in response to ongoing school improvement initiatives, must embrace new philosophies and implement practices designed to engage an increasingly diverse student population in meaningful, active learning and prepare them with the skills they need to make successful school-to-career and career-to-career transitions.

To direct student learning for workplace readiness, career educators must understand contemporary career development theories such as Social Cognitive Career Theory, cognitive information processing theory, contextual learning theory, and the values-based approach to career development (Beale 2001). These theories address the many ways that individuals develop new knowledge and use information to make decisions and solve problems. "An understanding of these theories and the contributions that each makes toward defining developmental periods, stages, and needs" must be accompanied by techniques for putting these theories into practice (Beale 2001, p. 4). Because some of these practices will be new and continually evolving in focus and design, career educators need ongoing education and training in order to engage in teaching and learning practices that support these career development theories and to assume the new roles that have become requirements for career educators: coach, collaborator, business partner, and technology advocate.

Roles of Career Educators

Coach

As students are encouraged to construct their own knowledge through engagement in and reflection on personal, school-related, and work experiences, coaching has become a significant teaching strategy for encouraging such knowledge development. To help students learn in the way they learn best—through hands-on, experience-based learning—educators must be able to *facilitate* rather than dictate learning. They must know how to formulate guiding questions that will direct students to new discoveries about themselves, their learning processes, and the application of skills in the workplace. They must know how to engage students in productive small group work and motivate them to work independently as well as in small groups (Railsback 2002).

To be effective coaches, educators need good interpersonal skills that enable them to interact positively with students, parents, and the community. Management skills, problem-solving skills, organizational skills, and ethics are also important attributes for guiding students toward skill development and school-to-work transitions (Greenberg 2001). Coaching to facilitate new ways of teaching and learning, such as project-based learning, requires educators to analyze tasks and skills needed to carry out a project and facilitate the process by setting up a plan of action and implementing and evaluating the project. In guiding students through projects, career educators must be able to explain how the project will contribute to student learning; facilitate decision making, thinking, and problem solving; and instill in students a sense of personal responsibility, self-esteem, and integrity (Railsback 2002). Most of all, effective coaches must be fully committed to helping students find ways to "balance work, roles and responsibilities with other life roles and responsibilities" (Engels and Harris 1999, p. 75).

Collaborator

Collaboration between teachers is key to the successful integration of academic and work-related education. A workplace-relevant curriculum requires the collective knowledge, experience, and influences of teachers in both discipline areas. Working as a team, academic and career educators can collaborate on solutions to problems they face in the classroom and act as peer advisors, providing information and feedback. They can identify similarities in course content and redesign their courses around a common theme that emphasizes the development of both academic and technical skills (Smith and Edmunds 1999).

Rayman (1999) contends that teachers must not limit their collaboration to intraclassroom endeavors, but must "forge cooperative relationships with faculty, advising professionals, student affairs professionals, administrators, parents, and student groups to take advantage of the multiplier effect that such collaborative relationships can have in furthering our goal of enhanced student career development" (p. 179).

Parents can serve as valuable contributors to career development when they collaborate in the education process. At Swansea High School in South Carolina, parents are given information about the three career pathways their children might pursue—college preparatory, Tech Prep, and dual education—and the career clusters and courses of study related to them. Advising nights have been established to help parents review with students the next year's educational plan. More than 85 percent of the parents attend these sessions, thereby bringing together teachers, students, and parents for career-focused collaboration (Southern Regional Education Board 1999). The percentage of parents working with their children and a teacher-adviser to plan a program of study has increased from 4 percent in 1990 to 80 percent in 1996.

Business Partner

Partnering between school and the broader community is essential if the interests of business and industry are to be integrated with classroom activities. Through such partnering, "responsibility, authority, and accountability are shared by all partners" (Hoyt and Wickwire 2001, p. 241).

Career educators can help local businesses by guiding students to develop the skills these businesses have identified as crucial to their operations. Businesses can assist educators by providing for them and their students opportunities to learn about current workplace practices, job opportunities, and necessary skills through internships, worksite experiences, job shadowing, and mentoring (Smith and Edmunds 1999). Developing partnership arrangements may pose a challenge to educators who have little experience in selling to businesses the benefits of making social and financial commitments to education. They need to learn strategies for linking with business personnel, becoming personally acquainted with managers and personnel directors in local businesses so that they can learn about career opportunities and worksite experiences that will further their learning and enlist their help in making those experiences available to the school community (ibid.).

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Technology Advocate

Some level of technological skill is now required for most jobs. To be an advocate of technology and to be able to motivate students to learn the functions and workplace applications of technology, career educators themselves must be technologically proficient. They must seek opportunities to learn about, use, experiment with, and apply technology to learning so that they can "integrate it into the classroom, align it with student learning goals, and use it for engaged learning projects" (Rodriguez and Knuth 2000, p. 1). A recent research study showed that teachers who received technology training were "more likely to use and rely on digital content for instruction and to spend more time trying out software and searching for Web sites to use in class" (ibid., p. 2).

In school, technology must be used to "bolster instruction and help students develop higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills" (ibid., p. 3). Since it supports student-centered instruction, technology enhances the educator's role of coach and allows students to work collaboratively, learning from each other and from their mutual discoveries. Technology also makes it possible for teachers to work together on classroom projects. However, knowing the value of technology for teaching and learning and being a technology advocate are not the same thing. Teachers must be able to use technology to assist students who have various learning styles and special needs before they can advocate its value and motivate students to embrace it.

Types of Professional Development

"Professional development is a key tool that keeps teachers abreast of current issues in education, helps them implement innovations, and refines their practice" (Cook and Fine 1996, p. 1). Because the roles of career educators require interpersonal skills such as communication, cooperation, negotiation, and teamwork, professional development must allow educators time to learn, reflect upon, discuss, and debate with their peers the various concepts and issues related to career development theories, teaching and learning strategies, school-to-work practices, school/business linkages, and technology use for career development.

Professional development cannot occur as a result of one-day workshops or single training sessions. It must be ongoing, designed with teacher input, foster critical reflection and meaningful collaboration, and allow for follow-up and support that is sustained over the long term (ibid.) Professional development can come in a variety of forms such as "mentoring, modeling, ongoing workshops, special courses, structured observations, and summer institutes" (Rodriguez and Knuth 2000, p. 4). It must provide opportunities for teachers to explore new roles, develop new instructional techniques, refine their practice, and broaden themselves both as educators and as individuals. Beau Fly Jones contends that "effective professional development is necessary for all teachers involved in educational reform" (Cook and Fine 1996, p. 3). It must enrich teaching and improve learning, support teacher development, be ongoing and long term, be job embedded and inquiry based, support current beliefs about teaching and learning, be clearly related to reform efforts, be modeled after learning experiences considered valuable for adults valuable for adults, and support systemic change (ibid.).

Conclusion

School-to-work, curriculum integration, and new career development theories have implications for how career educators approach teaching and learning. Professional development activities may enable them to broaden and expand their expertise in performing their new roles and connecting education, work, and career. Some strategies for the professional development of teachers in school-to-work systems include the following (*School-to-Work and Professional Development for Teachers* 1997):

- Professional development as a continuous improvement process
- Worksite experience
- Workshops and conferences
- Preparation for new roles in school-to-work governance
- Use of teacher networks
- Collaboration with teacher unions

Such professional development strategies should go beyond learning new skills, encompassing formal and informal ways to help teachers develop new insights into practice and new approaches to career-technical education.

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